

NEWS

Fire Station 13 garners community support for renovation

By Travis Hunter

LA JOLLA LIGHT

The La Jolla community has stepped up to help renovate one of its fire stations and, if the support continues, the facility may have much-needed improvements completed by early next year.

La Jolla's Fire Station 13 on Nautilus Street is in need of expansion and several improvements. Originally constructed as a temporary facility in 1976, the station remains in full-time use. Men and women firefighters share bedrooms separated only by makeshift curtains.

The captain's office at the station is little more than a corner of the living room, just steps away from the television and across the room from the small kitchenette where firefighters eat their meals and relax with the newspaper. There are two bathrooms in a 1,000-square-foot station sometimes occupied by eight people.

With a cash-strapped city Fire Department in need of new stations all around the city, a replacement is not likely to come any time soon. City Council President Scott Peters, after a recent tour of the facility, made it a priority to improve the existing station.

Peters and the La Jolla Sunrise Rotary Club, which has taken over the effort to raise money for improvements and expansion, hosted a fund-raiser at the station June 28.

"(Former Fire Chief) Jeff Bowman said to me one day that the guys would appreciate it if I just came by for a cup of coffee," Peters said. "I was thinking, 'Wow, there's not much here.' They



JESSICA HORTON

Mayor Jerry Sanders talks June 28 about Fire Station 13 as Council President Scott Peters looks on.

asked me for \$5,000 just to fix the screens on the windows. I felt so bad."

Peters called Trip Bennett, a La Jolla architect who had done work on Peters' home, to ask if he would take a tour of the facility.

"I thought I'd get a free hour out of Trip, get him to take a walk around and get his opinion on how hard it would be

to improve the place," Peters said.

Bennett did much more than take a tour. He created and donated plans for a renovation that would create four individual bedrooms, renovate the existing bathrooms and add a new Americans with Disabilities Act-conforming bathroom, something the station currently lacks.

The plans also include the complete

renovation of the kitchen, the addition of a new living room that would allow the old living room to be used as a dining area and the creation of a separate office for the captains at the station. The work would add about 450 square feet to the facility.

Peters joked that Bennett missed his initial appointment to visit the station.

"He must have felt bad," Peters said. "Look where we are now."

Bennett is a member of the La Jolla Sunrise Rotary and is heading the fund-raising efforts. Bennett's son is a firefighter in Rancho Santa Fe, and the rest of the club members also had personal motivations to help the firefighters. Sunrise Rotary Club member Jack Morse's La Jolla home was destroyed in a fire, and firefighters from Station 13 pulled Morse and his wife from the flames. Morse died as a result of his burns, but his wife's life was saved.

Mayor Jerry Sanders, who also attended the fund-raiser, said the heroism displayed at the Morse home was just one example of the risks firefighters from Station 13 take on a regular basis.

"What they did with the fire that happened, that's what they do every day," Sanders said. "Risking their lives for others is a part of the job."

The Sunrise Rotary has raised more than \$100,000 toward their goal of \$450,000, and an anonymous donor has agreed to contribute \$1 for every \$2 raised by the club. The club hopes to finish raising funds by September and begin the four-month construction project in October.

The firefighters at Station 13 will provide most of the labor for the project.

Newly appointed San Diego Fire-Safety Chief Tracy Jarman was on hand for the fund-raiser. She was impressed with the turnout and the support the community has already shown for one of its stations.

"I'm just amazed," Jarman said. "Talk about innovative and creative. I'm really touched, and we really appreciate the community's support."

For more information, call the La Jolla Sunrise Rotary Club at (858) 551-5222.